

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

Future New York Openings

Lace on Her Petticoat-Booth, 9/4/51. Herman Shumlin to produce and direct London hit play by Aimee Stuart. Neva Patterson will star in Scottish romantic comedy...Ber-der Be Damned-Royale, 9/10/51. John Golden and Eddie Dowling producing Paul Vincent Carroll drama now being tried out. Lowe, Variety, reviewed it at Olney, Md., Playhouse Critic thought script had some scintillating lines, a lot of Irish charm and Eddie Dowling; but it needed a lot of work before a Broadway opening.

New York Critics Abroad

French drama mirrors a world that does not know which way to turn and so amuses itself in turning itself inside out, comments Clurman, New Republic. The element of intellectual paradox in Sartre and other plays bring a new dramatic tone to the theatre which is to an American fascinating, irritating and still in a perverse way, meaningful. These plays attempt to communicate certain peculiarly contemporary modes of French thinking and feeling...Ray Bolger's filming of Where's Charley? in London witnessed by Hawkins, WT&S. Bolger put in a full 8:30 to 5:00 PM day before the cameras the day the critic was on the set.

Strawhat Tryouts

Told to the Children-New comedy by Alan Campbell and Robert Stevenson starring Miriam Hopkins debuted at Corning, NY, Summer Theatre. Broadway hopes rest on performances rather than script, says Bone, Variety...Some Sweet Day-Anne Armstrong drama premiere at Barter Theatre, Virginia. Variety critic rated it dubious Broadway bet because of the folk tales limited audience...Man Bites Dog-Canton, Conn, Show Shop musical revue by Alfred Burke and Donald C. Carter is a feeble attempt, pans Billboard reviewer. Sketch revisions and a few more numbers would aid it immeasurably.

Hits Revisited

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn-Alvin, 4/19/51. Second view of musical adaptation of Betty Smith novel by Watts, Post, found him backing his original first night review. He still thinks it is a warm, pleasant, likeable show in great part due to Arthur Schwartz' charming score and the performance of Shirley Booth. Her portrayal is one of enormous skill, humor and richness. Though it still seems to him that the show has book trouble from time to time.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Add recommended reading to be done in full: Walter Kerr's brilliant Sunday Times article August 12 entitled "Theatre in the Red." And another reminder to read in full the almost definitive series in July issues of Billboard on complex problems of ANTA written by Dennis McDonald.

News & Notes

Louis Verneuil will appear in his own Love and Let Love...Dramatic Workshop moved to Capitol Theatre...Columbia Pictures working on script of Pal Joey...Seventeen backers asked to put up additional ten per cent...David Warfield left over a million dollars to charities...Equity Library Scrapbooks casting Sept. 17...Stalag 17 cast undisputed softball champions of Broadway.

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' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 11. Women's Wear Daily | 21. Freeman |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. George Jean Nathan | 24. Chr. Science Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass | 15. Ward Morehouse | 25. Sat. Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. Morning Telegraph | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Journal American | 17. Variety | 27. Time |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard | 28. Nation |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 19. Theatre Arts | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Newark News | 20. New Leader | 30. New Yorker |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

- Cont: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.
None: 16-21-23-28.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50

- Cont: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50

- Cont: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 21-25.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

- Cont: 28.

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

- Cont: 28. None: 19.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

- Cont: 14-19. None: 21-25-28.

THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51

- Cont: 4-6-7-14-19-21-24-25-27. None: 12-20-22.
So-So: 8.

SEVENTEEN-6/22/51

- Cont: 2-4-7-26-27-28-30. None: 12-20-22.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

- Cont: 27. So-So: 23.
None: 5-9-10-12-14-20-21-28-29.

STALAG 17-5/8/51

- Cont: 4-20-23-28-30. So-So: 3. None: 19-21.

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

- Cont: 2-3. None: 14-19-20-21-22-24-25-28-29.

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51

- Cont: 2-7-14-18-20-25-27-28. None: 15-19-21.

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' TV & Radio Notes '
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Critics and reporters who wish to appear on MBS Kal Ross "Critics vs. Entertainer" feature Tuesday nights from Monte's Belmont Plaza may contact Larry Gore, PL8-0265...Irving Berlin working on hour musical containing his songs for NBC TV..."The Oscar Hammetstein II Story" will be offered in two chapters on CBS TV Toast of the Town in September...ABC TV Say It With Acting now on full network Fridays at 7:30 EDT...DuMont optioned an hour version of Inside USA...Ethel Barrymore will interview guests from all fields on television program "Room with a View". Maurice Evans considering TV series in which he would be producer, narrator and star...Joe E. Brown subbing for ABC Breakfast Club's Don McNeill...Yul Brynner may soon star on TV in a Fu Manchu series...Shuberts named eastern representatives for Motion Picture Television Center, Los Angeles.

Laurence Olivier and Vivian Leigh broadcast two 15 minute excerpts from their twin Cleopatras over BBC...Earlier BBC featured a 30 minute excerpt from Three Sisters...Helen Hayes gave her \$6,500 fee for appearing on NBC TV Arthur Murray Show to charity...WINS Big Joe Rosenfield ran benefit at Gramercy Ghost...Cyril Ritchard, now in Australia in Private Lives running half hour variety program on Australian Broadcasting Commission stations.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation network "On Stage with Ben Kamsler" praised by McStay, Variety. Program originating in Toronto and heard on 40 stations Sundays, features news and guests, is something needed to create increased interest in the theatre, critic stated...Robert Alda and Constance Moore will emcee ABC TV "Meet Me At the Waldorf."

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' Green Room Department '
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NEW AUDIENCES...Problem of lack of appreciation of drama by teen agers should be studied by ANTA, Actors Equity and League of New York Theatres, recommends Eaton, Press. The reviewer attended an outdoor musical and noted that the youngsters were baffled by it, while the adults applauded in the wrong spots. Is it that TV has developed a mute audience, or that our showmen have failed to produce a legit theatre important enough to win the upcoming generation?

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Would-be reviewers should study Barrett Clark's "European Theories of the Drama" as the definitive textbook on drama criticism, suggests Coleman, Mirror...Many critics will have to eat their words on what they call the best and worst plays of the coming season, predicts Chapman, News...Sean O'Casey nominated for Nobel prize by George Jean Nathan.

USE TAX MONEY...Professional theatre should realize that the millions of dollars collected in amusement taxes are used to subsidize such industries as shipbuilding and aviation, points out Show Business editorial. This money should be used for the theatre instead.

COLUMN TIPS...Shuberts negotiating for Earl Carroll Theatre in Hollywood, hears Lait ...Two on the Aisle success may bring new wave of plotless musicals say Kilgallen.

CLEAN THEATRE...Suggestive element which is becoming increasingly evident in British touring shows must be removed, states Stage editorial. It would be a bad thing for theatre if the man in the street turns his back on the music hall in disgust or if the local authorities were forced to act.

ABBEEY FIRE...Irish got least emotional about Abbey Theatre fire notes Watts, Post. Sean O'Faolain's article expressed feelings of most Irish when it stated that Dublin theatre should have been torn down long ago. The Abbey in recent years has lost great deal of its historic prestige. Watts feels it is unjustifiable pessimism to think that the bleakness of the current Irish theatre scene is not temporary.

TV & PLAYWRIGHTS...In spite of good intentions the forthcoming TV program featuring Playwrights Company productions won't have much of a chance against the medium's taboos and censorship, predicts O'Brien, Journal American. The dramatists will first learn what creative frustration really can be.

SELF MADE CRITICS...Tendency of authors to blast their own works may make drama critics unnecessary, muses George Jean Nathan. Edmund Wilson told the press that his play The Little Blue Light was made "nonsensical" because of cuts made by producers. While T.S.Eliot writes that his Murder in the Cathedral greatly overdid the choral interludes, and that The Cocktail Party had much less poetry in it than most thought.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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September "Theatre Arts" features article on NY critics by Richard Gehman... Thomas Dash named to replace late Kelcey Allen as drama critic for Women's Wear, with Ben Schneider taking over Allen's advertising work...Jolson Memorial Theatre to be erected at Brandeis University, Waltham, Mass...Shubert Alley closed 24 hours to traffic to keep franchise as private road...Borscht Capades will serve free cold borscht with sour cream during intermissions, Bagels and Yox will give free bagels and lox to first nighters...R.H.Burnside honored by Dazian's theatrical fabric house on its 109th anniversary...Coordinating Council for Negro Performers formed...Call Me Madam sold to movies for \$300,000...Guys and Dolls producers not to join Council of Living Theatre out of town program...Fellowships of \$750 in ANTA Play Contest awarded to Alexander Greendale, Eugene O'Donnell and William Marchant.

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' Interview Hi-Lights '
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BERT LAHR...Two on the Aisle star finds audiences tougher today than at any time during his career, he told Morehouse, WT&S. People see so much that they don't get amused as easily. Even children become critics. When something comes on TV which they don't think is funny they turn it off. But if you have something that really brings a response it will get over as big as it ever did.

MARTHA STEWART...New Guys and Dolls lead, subbing for Vivian Blaine who is in Hollywood making a picture, is playing the role the producers wanted her for in the first place, Rice, Post, discovered. She auditioned for Feuer and Martin, but by the time they made up their minds to pick her she was in Hollywood making "Aaron Slick from Pumpkin Crick."

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' Meet the Critic - William Hawkins, Jr. '
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ANTA can be a hit, William Hawkins, Jr. told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. Just returned from a month's play going in London, the World-Telegram & Sun critic believes firmly that ANTA will be able to solve its own problem and become a moving force in the American theatre. Federal subsidy at this time isn't the answer, and ANTA wouldn't want it now, he stated.

Constant negative criticisms by theatre people and critics over ANTA is mostly unjust, he believes. Much of it is not based on fact, little of it is constructive. None offered any aid to solve the problems. The complaint of some Broadway producers that ANTA is running in competition with them is uncalled for. Any producer could have put on a ten play season last year, but none did.

A recent London Times editorial, he recalled, pointed out that England has had a national theatre movement for over a hundred years, but only now have they laid a cornerstone for a permanent building. ANTA, which bought its own building last year, has come much farther in a few years.

American theatre in certain respects, lacks the continuity the English theatre has, he said. There stars and theatres are not allowed to remain idle for long. Many charge that two producers hold a monopoly on the English theatre. However much this is true, it is a good monopoly, he added. The best seats in an English theatre cost \$2.25, while cheap seats at Old Vic sell for 21 cents.

The never ending problem of how to encourage theatre going on a larger scale could be solved by cheaper seats, the critic commented. Because going to the theatre takes on the aspects of a production, the playgoer is in a shopping mood. By pricing the orchestra on a sliding scale, with the higher prices for the first few rows, and lower prices for the remainder of the orchestra, the ticket buyer could shop for seats. High production costs might be cut, believes Hawkins, if scenic designers calmed down. The critic has heard of many cases where a play or musical appeared delightful on a bare stage, but was literally lost in the massive scenery. The fault might be that the designer is trying to impress his name on the public, rather than do a job for the theatre.

Hawkins graduated from Washington & Lee University in 1933, and obtained his law degree there in 1935. But he never practiced. Three months after graduation he joined the New York story department of Selznick Pictures. He later was story editor of Goldwyn and Columbia Pictures in New York. In 1937 he joined the World-Telegram as Restaurant Editor. During the war he was on active duty with the USNR from 1942-1945. He has been drama critic of the World-Telegram & Sun since 1946. Like several of his colleagues who are also bachelors, he explains that a critic's life isn't conducive to a happy domestic life.

